

Order Passeriformes, Family Artamidae,  
Genus Pseudartamus.

*Pseudartamus cyanopterus*—The Wood Swallow.

Description.—Head, neck, and breast light fuliginous grey, gradually becoming darker on the back, rump, abdo-

men, and flanks; upper and under tail coverts almost black; lores and feathers at the base of the lower mandible dusky; outer surface of wings dark slaty blue; outer web of second, third and fourth primaries white; under wing coverts white; under surface of primaries and secondaries ashy grey; tail black, broadly tipped with white; the two central tail feathers and the outer webs of the two outer tail feathers entirely black; bill light slaty blue, tipped with black; legs and feet lead colour; iris brown. There is little or no difference between the male and female. Young.—Brownish grey above and below, each feather with a broad whitish shaft streak; primaries and secondaries narrowly edged with greyish buff.

Total length of skin, 170 m.m.; wing, 130 m.m.; tail, 80 m.m.; tarsus, 20 m.m.; bill, 16 m.m.

Distribution.—All the southern parts of this State. It does not extend into the dry interior, its place being there taken by *Austrartamus melanops*. It is also found in Victoria, New South Wales, Southern Queensland, and Tasmania.

Habits.—It is a resident bird in South Australia, though, perhaps, not so plentiful in winter as in spring and summer: possibly there is a partial migration or they may wander in search of better food supplies. Odd pairs have been known to stay in the same locality for several years. They like open forest country rather than thick scrub. Most of their time is spent upon the wing, looking for insects, or perched in companies upon a bare tree limb, fence, or telegraph wire, from whence they sally forth to catch any passing insects, returning to the perch with their capture. When perched in this way they have a habit of lifting one wing, partially opening it as though to stretch it and closing it again: this is repeated many times. After nesting time they congregate in parties of from 10 to 40 in number, and occasionally in much larger flocks. They do not nest in companies: each pair keeps to its own beat, and drives away all intruders of the same species. At this time they will attack any birds or animals, large or small, which come near the nest, and will even attack man, swooping swiftly down upon him with harsh cries, and snapping the bill. In the non-breeding season they roost in companies, having the peculiar habit of clinging together in a bunch like a swarm of bees. Favourite roosting places are the thickish branch of a tree with rough bark, such as a peppermint, a thick bunch of gum leaves, or the butt of a mistletoe. The

first birds arrive at dusk, and get a firm foothold upon the roosting place, and the others cling on to them as they arrive. The same roosting place is used night after night. They sometimes gather in the same way in the day time, particularly on cold, misty, or drizzly days.

Food.—This is mostly taken upon the wing, much after the manner of swallows, but they also search the bark of trees for insects, clinging to it with the feet, and using the outspread tail as a support. Occasionally they take their food upon the ground. It is not uncommon to see them searching the flowers of *eucalypti*, *hakea*, and other flowering shrubs, but whether for the nectar or for insects is not known. With this possible exception the food consists entirely of insects of all classes. They are especially fond of bees, and for that reason are not beloved by the apiarist.

Flight.—Graceful and gliding; very like that of swallows.

Song.—While hawking for insects or sitting upon a perch they utter a single, rather harsh and plaintive note frequently repeated. In the spring they have a continuous twittering song, soft and musical, but so low pitched as not to be heard at any great distance. When singing they have a habit of wagging the partly outspread tail from side to side.

Nest.—Favourite nesting places are the top of a broken off limb, between a piece of loose bark and the hole of a tree, in a thick fork of a peppermint, or in the butt of a mistletoe. The nest may be any height from the ground, from a few feet to 40 feet or more, but is usually not more than 10 or 12 feet up. It is rather a frail looking structure, but is really strongly, though lightly, constructed. The materials are fine twigs and dried grasses for the framework, and rootlets and finer grasses for the lining. No soft material, such as fur or feathers, is used. Two, sometimes three, broods are reared in the season; the young birds of the first clutch being driven away as soon as they are able to look after themselves. The same nest is sometimes used twice, but usually it is too dilapidated, and is pulled to pieces to make way for a new one in the same place. The breeding season lasts from August to December. The usual clutch is three eggs, but sometimes four, and sometimes only two are laid.

Eggs.—The ground colour varies from white, through creamy white, to light brown. They are spotted, mostly in a

ring about the larger end, with dark brown, black, and dull purple, the latter being semi-submerged.

Average measurement of 18 eggs, 2.33 c.m. x 1.73 c.m.

Largest egg, 2.50 c.m. x 1.80 c.m.

Smallest egg, 2.25 c.m. x 1.70 c.m.

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